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ABSTRACT

A survey of the concept of equality in American thought and literature reveals varying attitudes about socioeconomic opportunities and the function of education. In 1848, de Tocqueville foresaw that industrialization would create a manufacturing aristocracy which would be a threat to the equality demonstrated in agrarian America. During the Jacksonian era, appeals to equality and a classless society were met with disinterest, mockery, and defiance. As both women and children began to suffer the inequities of industrialism, literary artists depicted human beings less than equal because of social and political practices, economic arrangements, and the human condition itself. In the post-Jacksonian era, Horace Mann proposed an educational system that would equalize the conditions of men. Education was to bring children from all backgrounds together for moral instruction; the schools were to be the primary force in social change. The Progressives remained confident in the power of education to cure the ills of society while blacks and women struggled to be heard. Current theorists acknowledge that schools cannot eradicate the effects of economic and social inequality. They can, however, guarantee the individual's right to a fair beginning. (Author/KC)

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Equality of Opportunity: Perspectives and Possibilities

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The American Dream exists in the imaginary sphere. The real world is its foundation; but it reaches beyond what is to what is not--or, perhaps to what is not yet. We might say that it refers to future possibility, the idea of which arises out of what we feel to be lacking in the "now." For some, it is an entirely personal possibility: fulfillment of some particular kind; an improvement in status; the attainment of wealth; what is variously called "success." For others, it is grasped as public possibility: a desired condition of the democratic polity. Metaphors like "Paradise" and "Eden" and "Heavenly City" have often been used; so have "Canaan" and "Jerusalem." In recent times, it has been represented as the "Golden Gate" or the "Golden Mountain; it has referred to streets paved with gold. For Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, it was the "territory ahead"; for Scott

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Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, it meant going "about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty." For Henry James's Isabel Archer, it meant having the wind in her sails, experiencing "the absolute boldness and wantonness of liberty." Each one went on a journey, as did the original seekers for a "new world"; and, indeed there have always been journey themes in our history, themes of exploration, themes of quest. So the American Dream has been a dream about beginnings, continually new beginnings; and equality had to do (for some, at least) with having the right to begin.

That, of course, was part of the creed, of the American promise: the view that each living human being, no matter what his origin, was equal to every other. In almost all cases, at least until the mid-twentieth century, that person was white and male; and, for many Blacks and for many women, 'equality' was a name for an unkept promise, or for freedom, or for the rights of which they were deprived. The very idea, however, that people were entitled to equality was a dramatic break with tradition in a world where most people were frozen in place by class differences, poverty, confining traditions, resignation. It was apprehended many times as a kind of description of the way human beings were in relation to one another. The fact that it signified moral equality, or the equal right to opportunity, was often overlooked.

The right to begin, of course, carries with it no guarantees. The future might appear to be waiting at the frontier, or out at sea, or in Walden woods, or in the metropolis, or (at length) in Paris or Rome; but there were no assurances that there was a future or what the future would be. Perhaps strangely, America's imaginative writers were aware of this and communicated what it signified, even as they celebrated the new beginnings that seemed to define the new world. They were far more likely than were reformers or polemicists to suggest the ambiguities of equality, the constraints that limited or deflected it, the mystifications that obscured it.

Huckleberry Finn finds himself back among the pieties of the slave society at the end of his journey, with everything "smashed up and ruined"; and it is clear that that is in large measure due to the "cash nexus," the frauds, and the exploitativeness of the pre-Civil War time. Jay Gatsby, for all his wealth, remains "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" in the eyes of the Buchanans. When he takes the blame for the automobile accident, the Buchanans simply retreat "back into their money, or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together...." In this case, class distinctions and the power of "old wealth" usurp Gatsby's right to begin and, in fact, end his life. Isabel Archer, presumably liberated by an inheritance, "had taken the first steps in the purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end." Her money had made her vulnerable; she was "tampered with" by expatriate Americans for their own selfish ends. Moreover, she was a woman: convention and dependence raised the "dead wall." Again, because each one of them was human, he/she had the right to try, the right to begin; but the equality of opportunity each was granted was contingent on a range of variables. There was, in such contexts, no way of being sure.

Jefferson's original statement in the Declaration of Independence resounded in many ears as absolute and eminently clear. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," he wrote, "that all men are created equal...." He did not mean Blacks, of course; and he probably never thought of women. We do know now that his notion of equality dervied from an 18th century view of the uniformity of each species on the biological ladder and that equality, for him, was derived from what was presumed to be man's highest faculty, the "moral sense."[1] That moral sense was the source of human accountability, he believed, and the basis of human rights. This did not prevent him from making distinctions between persons of superior "parts and disposition" and other persons when he proposed a school system for the diffusion of knowledge in Virginia, nor from asserting that "twenty of the best geniuses will be

raked from the rubbish annually, and be instructed, at the public expense, so far as the grammar schools go."[2]

Yes, Jefferson wanted education for the common people, because he believed that "a due degree of liberty" might be secured if the government could rely on their "good sense." Above all, he wanted to see a virtuous government in a largely agricultural country. When people get "piled up upon one another in large cities," he said, "as in Europe, they will become corrupt as in Europe...."[3] The equality he envisaged could only, it would appear, be achieved in a small polis, a face-to-face community. This idea--the idea of what some have called "the garden"--continued to haunt American imagination,[4] even as contradictions mounted and what Jefferson called "circumstances forced industrialization on the American land. When the "machine" or the locomotive lumbered in, it became profoundly difficult for many people to hold to the idea of equality of opportunity--an opportunity to begin, each in his/her own fashion, to go in search.

I think of Henry David Thoreau describing the cattle-train going by and the "carload of drovers, too, in the midst, on a level with their droves now, their vocation gone, but still clinging to their useless sticks as their badge of office... So is your pastoral life whirled past and away."[5] He was not the only one who associated dignity and equality with a sense of what had been. At the beginning of Herman Melville's Moby Dick, there is a description of the landsmen who come to stare at the ocean on Sundays in New York--landsmen "of week days pent up in lath and plaster--tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks." And then Ishmael asks, "How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?" But the most climactic image of all is that of the steamboat crashing through the raft in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: "There was a yell at us, and a jingling of bells to stop the engines, a pow-wow of cussing, and whistling of steam--and as Jim went overboard on one side and I on the other, she came smashing right through the raft... And then, a minute later, he says, "...and of course that boat started her engines

again ten seconds after she stopped them, for they never cared much for raftsmen; so now she was churning along up the river, out of sight...." The raft and the small fraternal community aboard are the embodiments of equality, even as the river (running between the brutal riverbanks) is a metaphor for the open frontier. The steamboat with its red-hot furnace (like the cattle-cars and the office-desks and counters) evokes an organized industrial and commercial world in its impersonality and indifference, its implacable inequity.

For all this, when De Tocqueville published Democracy in America in 1848, he insisted that Americans loved equality even more than liberty. He saw equality as an "irresistible passion" and said that men "will endure poverty, servitude, barbarism, but they will not endure aristocracy."[6] He saw a potential danger in the preference for equality; but he was responding to the lived equality in the wilderness and on the frontiers, where people cleared the ground together, built houses together proffered what he called "the pleasures of equality" to themselves. A traveller with memories of monarchy behind him is likely to respond to the rough, free and easy, often violent life in open places with a feeling that equality may threaten public order at some point. But De Tocqueville was confronting an unprecedented "equality of condition" in a new democracy and on a new frontier, where men were declaring their independence every day because they felt equal, and where they resisted all attempts to interfere. A society of that sort, thought De Tocqueville, faced opposing dangers of anarchy and despotism; but he was primarily concerned (due to the way in which "democracy favors the growth of manufactures") about the rise of a manufacturing aristocracy, the harshest yet known to mankind. He said that "the friends of democracy should keep their eyes anxiously fixed in this direction; for if ever a permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy again penetrates into the world, it may be predicted that this is the gate by which they will enter."[7] It may be that, because of all the evidence of the passion for equality, he thought that such an aristocracy could be kept at bay; but an uncertainty and a degree of ambiguit

remained. De Tocqueville, too, heard the sounds of the steamboat in the fog.

The differences respecting the meanings of 'equality' were already more than rhetorical. Certain people were actually experiencing what it signified to be "as good as" the next person, especially when it came to the concrete tasks of life. Certain women, once having known a kind of equality in the days of cottage industry, were being thrust into an unequal "domestic sphere"[8] as their men moved into the factories. Little children throughout the north were living through the regularities and inequities of labor in the mills. Various writers and orators were still addressing themselves to an"endowment" that was presumably the same for all, no matter how diverse their plights. And others (primarily the literary artists, it turned out) were discovering over and over how much depended upon circumstances and conditions, how many human beings were in some manner less than equal because of social and political practices, economic arrangements, and (perhaps) the human condition itself.

There was a great upsurge of an old American milennialism at the time of the election of Andrew Jackson and the emergence of the "common man," a mode of optimism that veiled some of the painful actualities. With it came the belief that limiting factors, constraining factors, even the "old Adam" himself could be transcended and transformed. The milennial faith was a faith in the nation's special mission, special talents, and heroic destiny. It was associated with a confidence in human perfectibility and in the capacity of inspired speakers to appeal to the "moral sense" and the good will of the general population. If touched in that fashion, if reminded of their potentialities for becoming better or becoming perfect, slave-owners and caretakers and even husbands might abandon greed or oppressiveness and transform themselves. The reform movements, informed as they were with milennialism, developed languages oriented, not solely to natural rights and moral regeneration, bu to equality. Abolitionists came together in the northeast to demand emancipation for the Black people in the interests of the slaveowners as well as of their slaves.

William Lloyed Garrison, although using what he called a "coarse invective" in calling for the immediate enfranchisement of the slaves, grounded his argument in the "self-evident truth" in the Declaration that "all men are created equal...."[9] When Elizabeth Cady Stanton attended the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840 and discovered that, like the other women present, she was forced to sit concealed behind a curtain, she began working with Frederick Douglass and Lucretia Mott for a Declaration on women's rights as well. When the women finally gathered in convention at Seneca Falls some years later, they used the Declaration of Independence as model for their Declaration of Sentiments, substituting "Man" for "King George" and calling for immediate admission to all the rights and privileges possessed by other American citizens."[10] Dorothy Dix and other humanitarians were, in the same period, speaking out for the rights of the criminals and the insane; Samuel Gridley Howe was asking that the handicapped and the retarded be given equal status in the family of man.

Disinterest, mockery, resistance: these characterized the responses to most of the perfectionist appeals. People continued drinking, owning slaves, dominating their wives, overworking children, for all the eloquence of the moralists' words. There were, inevitably, fractures in the various movements, as increasing numbers of reformers realized that appeals to "better nature" would not be likely to work. Rights and equality of opportunity, it appeared, had to be struggled for, sacrificed for, claimed. There were cautionary words, desperate words, reminders, calls to action, critiques. Orestes Brownson railed at the "ostrich fancy" that prevented people from recognizing the true condition of the laboring classes. He sai that the great work of the age was "to raise up the laborer, and to realize in our own social arrangements and in the actual condition of all men, that equality between man and man, which God has established between the rights of one and those of another ....There must be no class of our fellow men doomed to toil through life as mere work men at wages."[11]

"Ostrich fancy" may also have kept people from seeing through the rosy surfaces of life in the Lowell cotton mills where five thousand girls (mostly farmers' daughters) worked seventy-hour weeks, lived in boarding houses, put out their own newspapers, and looked contented and healthy to visitors from abroad. After some years, of course, when farmers' daughters no longer regarded it as a relief from household drudgery to go to Lowell, a black wagon began cruising through the New England states in charge of a man paid a dollar a head for every girl he brought to market and to work. At about that time, Melville wrote a story called "The Tartarus of Maids," which is clearly about the Lowell mills, although he called the site "Devil's Dungeon paper-mill." The narrator watches the pulp-machine, the cylinders, the wheels, and (most particularly) "the yet more pallid faces of all the pallid girls...." The proprietor tells him that most of the girls come from far-off villages; and the visitor asks, "Why is it, sir, that in most factories, female operatives, of whatever age, are indiscriminately called girls, never women?" The proprietor responds that it may be because they are generally unmarried and then goes on to say they they will not have married women. "We want none but steady workers: twelve hours to the day, day after day, through the three hundred and sixty-five days, excepting Sundays, Thanksgiving, and Fast-days. That's our rule. And so, having no married women, what females we have are rightly enough called girls." Again, the imaginative writer was able, not simply to break through a mystification, but to reveal in its full complexity what actually stood in the way of human equality, certainly where laboring females (doubly unequal) were concerned.

For at least two decades, nevertheless, those Emerson called "the soldiery of dissent" relied upon appeals to conscience, to moral sense, to recall to people their apparent commitment to equality. Emerson, Thoreau, and Nathaniel Hawthorne all tended to be deeply sceptical of single-minded moralists or those they spoke of as "philanthropists." In Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance, that novel about a failed Utopian experiment, a deliberate effort to form an egalitarian community is

undertaken by a reformer named Hollingworth, the kind of man prone to using others to accomplish his altogether high-minded ends. His very language is chill, however; it evokes the implacability of industry. "I have hammered thought out of iron," he says, "after heating the iron in my heart." Indeed, at one point, he is described as a "steam engine." It seems clear that he is an example (like Hawthorne's Chillingwort Ethan Brand, and Dr. Aylmer) of the scientific-business mentality developing side by side with the reform consciousness, of the manipulative mentality so often accompanyir "doing good" in America. The implication is that whatever equality is attained under such control is problematic from the start.

Implacably, however, the emergent industrial system--most often without benevolent disguise--was sorting people out and stratifying them in ways that had little to do with equality. Robert Owen and Frances Wright, the Utopian Socialists, certainly pointed repeatedly and openly to the consequences of the "unexampled increase of productive power"; and emerging unions(while hopefully supporting most of the proposals for reform) pointed to increasing class divisions. Melville, again, gave the most potent expression to what was happening with regard to equality. In Moby Dick, there is a paean to the "abounding dignity that can be seen "shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His ominipresence, our divine equality!" Not long before, however, when Ishmael signs aboard the Pequod to take his place among the "knights and squires," he is reminded by the Quaker owners that, instead of wages, all hands are to receive shares of the profits called "lays, and that these are proportioned to the degree of importance pertaining to the respective duties of the ship's company." Ishmael is effectively swindled by the scheming owners; and when this is coupled with Captain Ahab's later comment that "cash, aye cash" will keep his men in order, and finally with the vision of the flaming furnaces called the try-works, we cannot but think of money and technology at continual war

with "divine equality." Just before the end, there is a terrible commentary on what equality can come to mean when "all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltiness, all variables were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to."

A view of this sort was in every respect anti-perfectionist; in many respects, in fact, it links the demonic in life with greed and the alienation to which it can lead. The futility of perfectionist appeals and a suspicion of a destructive force lying below the surfaces of life fed into the motivations of Horace Mann and his fellow reformers when they argued for the establishment of tax-supported common schools. They were acutely aware of the changes taking place in post-Jacksonian America. Even as they welcomed progress on the one hand; they saw threats to public order in the corruption and the stimulation of the growing cities. The tension between "poverty and profusion," they believed, could only breed eventual rebellion. The influx of immigrants unacquainted with life in a free society would lead to "license" rather than liberty. It seemed wholly evident that the reformers had not succeeded in convincing people to give up the pursuit of wealth, nor to stop drinking, nor to pay heed to reminders that "all men are created equal." In fact, as Mann saw it, the prized "democracy" was entirely likely, without constraint, to degenerate into a "spectacle of gladiatorial contests."

Education, Mann believed, was the only appropriate alternative to perfectionism and to political reform; and it was education that would "equalize the conditions of men."[12] In fact, equality would mean nothing if individuals were not converted from automata to thinking beings capable of self-control and "voluntary compliance" with the laws of righteousness. The other face of this was what has been thought of as an ideology of equal opportunity, presuming the existence of an educational "ladder" accessible (with the traditional exceptions) to everyone. If a person possessed the competence and energy to set foot upon that "ladder," he was believed

to have an equal chance to pursue wealth and upward mobility. The professed intention of the common school was make that chance available. "It knows no distinction," wrote Mann, "of rich and poor. of bond and free, or between those who, in the imperfect light of this world, are seeking, through different avenues, to reach the gate of heaven."[13]

The emphasis, it must be said, was placed as much on character training as it was on the fundamentals of literacy; and it was believed that the proper kind of moral instruction would (through the encouragement of certain faculties and the discouragement of others) ensure righteousness, honesty, and even compassion in the young. At once, it would effectively induct children of all backgrounds into a homogeneous, common culture. Having had shared experiences when young in the same schools persons would avoid the extremes of competition when adult, would be able to maintain communication with one another, and would be freed "from the ravages of the spirit of party." No greater hope had ever been expressed with regard to the potency of schools and, indeed, no such far-ranging opportunity had ever been offered to the children of all the people, rich and poor. Confident as they were, Mann and his colleagues could not but believe that public education would become the primary force for social change. The despotism and anarchy De Tocqueville had warned of would both be avoided; the "vengeance" of the poor would be restrained; social revolutions would no longer be necessary.

We have already seen how others were calling attention to the character of industrial capitalism at the time, to the Captain Ahabs who were becoming captains of industry, to the brutality of factory life, to the exclusions of great sections of the population from what was called "opportunity." Whether or not the reformers intended (as the radical historians tell us[14]) to institutionalize racism and sexism and, at the same time, to "school" a docile working class, the claim that conditions would be equalized by means of education was invalidated daily in the lived lives of the majority.

Moreover, women were still confined to the so-called "private sphere," deprived of legal rights, unable to vote. Women teachers were treated as "girls" and forbidden to marry. It was in 1841 that the Boston school committee went out of its way to compliment women teachers because they were "unambitious, frugal, and filial." A Denver superintendent is quoted as having said that, if such teachers had advice to give their superior, "it is to be given as the good daughter talks with the father.... The dictation must come from the other end."[15] In the same decade, when Lucy Stone attended the co-educational Oberlin College (where, it was announced, "women's highest calling was to be the mothers of the race...and they should stay within that special sphere in order that future generations should not suffer from the want of devoted and undistracted mother care"[16]), she did so well that she was selected to write the commencement oration. But then she discovered that the oration would have to be read by a male student; and she refused the honor and left the school.

It was some time before the complex experiences of women found adequate expression in imaginative literature; but, when such novels as Louisa May Alcott's Work and Kate Chopin's The Awakening finally appeared, the large claims about equality of opportunity that were continually being made should have been (although they seldom were) made problematic and qualified. At the beginning of Work, the young heroine announces to her aunt that "there's going to be a new Declaration of Independence." Her aunt asks what she means, and she says, "I mean that, being of age, I'm going to take care of myself, and not be a burden any longer....I don't intend to wait...but, like the people in the fairy tales, travel away into the world and seek my fortune...." A middle class person, Christie can only find work as a housemaid and then as a seamstress. Near the end, when she is widowed, she goes among working women to talk to them about a "new emancipation." A little girl raises her hand, "a hopeful omen, seeming to promise that the coming generation of women will not only receive but deserve their liberty...." The Awakening is far

less optimistic but renders the "daily treadmill" of a woman's life as an obedient wife with far more resonance. Incapable of seeing alternatives to the "soul's slavery" of domesticity and a life of promiscuity, Edna Pontellier (like so many women in novels) commits suicide. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper, the heroine is even more overtly oppressed by a presumably loving husband and, quite deprived of any reasonable opportunity, goes mad. A few years later, in the first years of the 20th century. Edith Wharton told the story of Lily Bart in The House of Mirth, the story of a woman victimized by her own internalized oppression. Lily Bart accedes to the manners and morals of a male-dominated society caught up in the "cash nexus." Forced to make compromises, economically dependent, she says she was taught only to care for money and admiration; and yet she despises everything she tries to win. At length, caught in a morass, feeling like a mere cog in a machine, she dies of her own impotence by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. As always in the case of literary art, it is nearly impossible to distinguish the inner from the outer in Wharton's work, the effects of social determinism from the erosions of personal incapacity. But we need only think of such experiences as Lily Bart's and Edna Pontellier's in relation to such phrases as "all men are created equal" and "equalize the conditions of men" to realize how much further we have to go to understand what equality of opportunity actually means--and how many were actually endowed with the right to begin.

Nevertheless, as the 19th century went on, there was increasing articulation of the ideology of equal educational opportunity, with the idea that problems like Lily's and Edna's, in addition to those of Irish and Italian and Polish immigrants, might be solved if they were equipped with the skills needed by a society becoming more varied and more complex year by year. The "educational ladder" was extended, as public secondary schools were built around the country. Educational opportunity was linked to the emergence of meritocracy, a system John Rawls was to describe much later as one in which "equality of opportunity means an equal chance to leave the

less fortunate behind in the personal quest for influence and social position."[17] Meanwhile, in the period Mark Twain called the "Gilded Age" after the Civil War, when big business and large-scale industry were expanding in scope and power, when cities were multiplying, when finance (and financiers) were determining the nature of the nation's voyage, there was a growing consciousness of forces without that somehow could not be controlled. The point of the educational ideology was, in part, that an individual's future was his/her responsibility. Submitting to and understanding some of the reasons for social controls, the ordinary individual had the wherewithal to control his/her own future, his/her own career.

Again, however, literary artists were capturing some of what it signified to feel the self the plaything of forces beyond understanding and control. Stephen Crane wrote of shipwrecked men being tossed by the waves in an open boat off the Florida coast. The correspondent who is the narrator in that story, "The Open Boat," keeps asking how the great gods of the sea can kill them after they have "worked so hard"; and then, at last, he comes to the realization that their drowning would not in any fashion "maim the universe." In The Red Badge of Courage, Henry Fleming is moved back and forth by battlefield forces he cannot conceivably comprehend; in Maggie: Girl of the Streets, Maggie is destroyed by poverty and manipulations, no matter how much opportunity is made available to her. Hamlin Garland, in A Son of the Middle Border, wrote that, even in the villages and on the farms, life had become graceless and sordid, mechanized by routines. He wrote that he perceived plowmen, once proud of their equality, and their wives and daughters "pushed out into these lonely ugly shacks by the force of landlordism behind." Frank Norris wrote of working men reduced to helplessness by labor in the Chicago slaughterhouses; Theodore Dreiser, as in An American Tragedy, explored the ways in which individual fates were controlled by the pecuniary forces in society, the ambitions they gave rise to, the petty violence they unleashed. William Dean Howells, who once had called on his fellow writers to concentrate on the "smiling surfaces of life," wroteabout a tragic strike

in A Hazard of New Fortunes. An account of the police brutally breaking the strike ends: "March would have liked to run; he thought how his wife had implored him to keep away from the rioting; but he could not have left Lindau lying there if he would. Something stronger than his will drew him to the spot, and there he saw Conrad dead beside the old man." The words haunt: "something stronger than his will." The only way Howells could deal with his own loss of faith in democratic equality was creating a utopian, actually socialist novel called A Traveler from Altruria, where egalitarianism becomes the main theme.

Yes, there had been Walt Whitman. Dewey was to write, much later on, that "democracy is a name for a life of free and eniching communion. It had its seer in Walt Whitman."[18] And Whitman did write of "Love and Democracy." He did write, in "Starting from Paumanok": "O such themes--equalities! O divine average!" It is one of several hymns to "Democracy! near at hand to you a throat is now inflating itself and joyfully singing." After the Civil War, however, he also wrote the tirade called "Democratic Vistas," which called upon his readers to a new "personalism"--"a perfect uncontamination and solitariness of individuality." This was his response to the lost equalities, to the "sad, serious, deep truths" that made him write: "Of the holders of public office....I have found that not one in a hundred has been chosen by any spontaneous selection of the outsiders, the people, but all have been nominated and put through by little or large cabals of the politicians, and have got in by corrupt rings and electioneering, not capacity or desert. I have noticed how the millions of sturdy farmers and mechanics are thus the helpless supple-jacks of comparatively few politicians....Over these politicans...and over the powerfullest parties, looms a power...."

John Dewey knew these things, as he knew the meaning of emerging technology, "the new and relatively impersonal and mechanical modes of human behavior" that were beginning to overwhelm community.[19] But he believed that a reformed educational system would somehow lead to the reconciliation of technology and community. The schools

would restore the atmosphere of the nurturing family life once characteristic of farm communities, even as they engaged the young with meaningful "occupations" and empowered them to deal with the new technical changes sweeping over the land. In Democracy and Education, he wrote that "School facilities must be secured of such amplitude and efficiency as will in fact and not simply in name discount the effects of economic inequalities, and secure to all the wards of the nation equality of equipment for their future careers." And later: "A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and cont and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder."20 It is clear enough that the faith in the power of education remained. Dewey was carrying forward the confidence of the Progressive Era, with its belief that the application of scientific intelligence would cure the ills of an inequitable, oppressi corrupt society. Like Jane Addams, Lincoln Steffens, Herbert Croly, and other great liberal colleagues, he was expressing--and, frequently, acting upon--the hope that the enlargement of opportunity and the proper preparation of the young to take advanta of such opportunity would contain exploitation and alienation, would repair the deficiencies of the world.

Interested as they were in class and regional conflict, in the impacts of financial power on the lives of human beings, the progressives actually said little about the inequalities being suffered by the excluded ones, particularly the Blacks. After the Civil War, Booker T. Washington, with his belief in the gospel of class cooperation and his insistence on the necessity for industrial education before Blacks began making political demands, made it relatively easy for white liberals to deny what was happening in the north as well as the south. In Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, that sort of consciousness is made starkly clear when Dr. Bledsoe

tells the students in his college about the Founder, who made possible the "well-equipped classrooms" the young people now enjoy. He speaks of the Founder's patience, of his willingness to render under Caesar the things that are Caesar's, of his guidance of "a humble, but fast-rising people," of his leading his followers out of the land of ignorance, shouting "LET MY PEOPLE GO! when it was necessary, whispering during those times when whispering was wisest." And this speech comes almost immediately after the young narrator's graduation speech at the smoker, after the obligatory "Battle Royal," during which the blindfolded boys are forced to battle each other while the audience roars. He is introduced as the "smartest boy"; and he begins."'Social...' 'What?' they yelled. '...equality--' The laughter hung smoke-like, in the sudden stillness. I opened my eyes, puzzled. Sounds of displeasure filled the room....A small dry mustached man in the front row blared out, 'Say that slowly, son!' 'What sir?' 'What you just said!' 'Social responsibility, sir,' I said. 'You weren't being smart, were you, boy?' he said, not unkindly. 'No sir!' 'You sure that about 'equality' was a mistake?' "Oh, yes, sir,' I said 'I was swallowing blood.'

But there was W.E.B. DuBois also, criticizing the industrial schools, talking about the way they tempered the inner emancipation of the Blacks, making them patient when impatience would have killed them. He wanted to see Blacks being offered an extraordinary intellectual education; he wanted to see them pursuing their political rights, while refusing to whisper, even "when whispering was wisest." "How shall man measure Progress there where the dark-faced Josie lies?," he wrote in The Souls of Black Folk. "How many heartfuls of sorrow shall balance a bushel of wheat? How hard a thing is life to the lowly, and yet how human and real!" The difference between DuBois and Washington turned out to be the difference between those who would rely on the schools to bring about equality and those who were passionately certain that the structures of society itself must be changed.

The faces, the voices of patient and "enduring" Black people are made present in Faulkner's novels, where the bulldozer (the old "machine in the garden")

is joining the greed of the shopkeepers in destroying the pastoral past, and where slavery still hangs over the South like a curse that must be exorcised if it is not to destroy utterly what is valuable and true. But, for Faulkner, the guilt must be compensated for by white men like Ike McCaslin or paid for by white men like the Compsons and others. The one he called "the Negro" must--perhaps for century--wait patiently and "endure." Such novels as Richard Wright's Black Boy and Native Son, James Baldwin's Tell It On The Mountain, and (perhaps climactically) Invisible Man became challenges to that view of endurance, as they became revelations of a complexity and a suffering that mere "opportunity" cannot relieve. After all, the narrator of Invisible Man is provided educational opportunity and yet, when he breaks the code, he has to experience a series of "boomeranging expectations" in the factories and slums and political offices of New York. At the end, after the riot in the city streets, he goes underground in order to find himself, to discover that "I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!"

And, indeed, throughout the early part of the 20th century, with the measurement movements, the testing movements, the "sorting-out" movements, the "life-adjustment" movement, the excluded ones remained invisible as persons, as individuals who were what they were, with their own perspectives, their own dreams, their own lived lives. It was only when, with the Civil Rights movement, they created their own visibility, their insistent visibility, that government people and school people began seriously to examine what equality of opportunity actually meant and might some day mean. There is an irony, even as there is a glory, in the fact that so much began when the Reverend Martin Luther King made his "I have a dream..." speech one of the few over the years that attempted to recapture what was implicit in the American Dream. The story of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is by now well known, as are the stories of the incomplete efforts to compensate for the crippling and the deficits that were largely due to poverty and to dehumanizing environments. The conclusion of the Coleman Report on Equality of Educational

Opportunity was that, no matter what the quality of teaching in a school and no matter what the resources available, the important variables when it came to "equalizing" were family background and economic condition. When Christopher Jencks and his colleagues wrote Inequality some years later, it was already clear that equal opportunity could never guarantee equal results and certainly not economic equality. The authors concluded that neither family background, schooling, nor cognitive skills explained many of the variations in incomes, nor did background, schooling, test scores, and the like explain differences in vocational competence. It might be, they said, that equalizing competence was still important and probably ought to be an objective of social policy. At the end, they said that the contribution of public policy to the drift toward equality in the economic realm had been slight. And then: "As long as egalitarians assume that public policy cannot contribute to economic equality directly but must proceed by ingenious manipulations of marginal institutions like the schools, progress will remain glacial."[21] Given the American tradition of belief in the public school, this comment on the school's marginality disturbed many readers. It is worth noting, however, that Jencks and his colleagues (breaking with Mann and Dewey in what they said) did emphasize that the schools' primary functions were to teach, to expose the young to the search for meanin and value, and to be "satisfying places" in which to spend time.

If they were right, their conclusions were continuous with the intimations of many imaginative writers, as we have seen, with numerous reports on lived lives. It is difficult for me not to come to a similar conclusion: that the schools cannot eradicate the effects of economic inequality nor "equalize" the conditions of the mass It seems to me to follow that society itself must be governed by far more just principles if diverse individuals--of many capacities, many predilections--are to be granted the right to begin. Of course affirmative action is important; integration is important. Perhaps, particularly, social supports or social utilities are importan

day care centers, job programs, expanded health care, better housing, bigger libraries, and the rest. That is what is involved in the governing of society by more just principles; it requires that compassion become as significant as a regard for human rights.

As for schools: I believe that the focus ought to be on beginnings, not the end-points or products or pre-defined competencies with which we are preoccupied today. Beginnings, the taking of initiatives in inquiry and learning, the reflective pursuit of meanings that may illuminate lived lives: these ought to be the concerns of schools committed to equality. Even while encouraging the nurture of critical consciousness and a new wide-awakeness, I would want to place emphasis on the need to attend to multiple perspectives and multiple voices. There seems to me to be no other way to take up our journey again when there are so many roadblocks in the way.

Like Hannah Arendt and others, I believe in the importance of persons in their plurality being free to tell their stories in an open space, speaking in their own voices from their own locations in the world. For Arendt, a human plurality has "the twofold character of equality and distinction."[22] Without equality, without regard for one another as human, persons cannot comprehend one another or plan together for a common future. Without being recognized in their distinctiveness, they will have nothing to say that will be listened to by another individual, because all individual utterances would seem the same. (Certainly this is the case in classrooms where children are not recognized as persons, where there is only a "class," only "kids.") Without a recognition of distinctiveness as well, there is no likelihood of regard for multiple perspectives on what is held in common. And I am convinced that the only way to bring something truly common into being is by consulting the vantage points of diverse persons--a Captain Ahab and an Ishmael, a Bledsoe and and "invisible man," an Edna Pontellier and the "mother-woman" called Adele Ratignolle, a Garp and his mother, a child from the Barrio and one from uptown, a social studies teacher and the girl in the back row. No, education cannot be an equalizer

of the "conditions of man." Equality of opportunity--or even an unequal (or more equitable) allocation of resources--can guarantee the right to begin. But I do think, as we try to bring into existence a fairer common world, beginnings can be nurtured in our classrooms, all sorts of beginnings by all sorts of persons, who may be enabled to bring an "in-between" into being as they speak with one another and learn to act in concert with one another in spaces open for possibility. They may even be set free to dream, to move towards what is not yet.

I began with talk of the imaginary; and I can only end with an open question. The best sources for open questions are in poetry. Here is a poem by Robert Frost called "once By the Pacific":

> The shattered water made a misty din.
> Great waves looked over others coming in,
> And thought of doing something to the shore
> The water never did to land before.
> The clouds were low and hairy in the skies,
> Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes.
> You could not tell, and yet it looks as if
> The shore was lucky in being backed by cliff,
> The cliff in being backed by continent;
> It looked as if a night of dark intent
> Was coming, and not only a night an age.
> Someone had better be prepared for rage.
> There would be more than ocean water broken
> Before God's last Put out the Light was spoken.

Jean-Paul Sartre once said that literature ought to appeal to our freedom, to our indignation. Perhaps, after a discussion of equality, that should be the appeal, given these times. "Someone," Frost said, "had better be prepared for rage." Where there is rage, there is always possibility.

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